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PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS

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PLAGUE-ERADICATIVE WORK.

Since the report which was published in last week's issue, 3 cases of plague in man and 10 cases of rodent plague have been reported from New Orleans.

On pages 2368 to 2374 of this issue of the Public Health Reports will be found detailed statements of plague-eradivative measures being carried on in the United States and insular possessions.

CERTIFICATES OF HEALTH BEFORE MARRIAGE.

WISCONSIN MARRIAGE LAW HELD VALID BY A DIVIDED COURT.

August 2, 1913, the Legislature of Wisconsin passed a law requiring "all male persons making application for license to marry" to be examined by a physician and file a certificate showing that they are "free from acquired venereal diseases so nearly as can be ascertained by physical examination and by the application of the recognized clinical and laboratory tests of scientific search," before a marriage license is issued. The law went into effect January 1, 1914, and was published in full in the Public Health Reports of December 5, 1913, page 2665.

This law has attracted much attention, and its validity was seriously questioned, but the Wisconsin Supreme Court, in a case brought for the purpose of testing the law, has upheld it. Three of the judges rendered opinions, which are published in full on pages 2391 to 2403 of this issue of the Public Health Reports.

The law was attacked as being an unconstitutional interference with the natural right of individuals, as being unreasonably discriminatory in requiring males to be examined while making no such requirement as to females, and as being impracticable and unenforceable because physicians could not make the examination and tests required for the fee of \$3, which is the maximum allowed by the law; but the case really turned on the question whether or not the language of the law required the application of the Wassermann

test. It was conceded that if it was necessary to apply the Wassermann test the law could not be enforced because few physicians had the equipment or skill required, and it could not be made for the statutory fee of \$3.

The majority of the court held that the legislature did not intend to require the Wassermann test, but contemplated only a physical examination and such tests for venereal diseases as the practicing physician with an ordinarily good equipment could make.

All of the judges admitted or assumed the right of the State to regulate the marriage relation, but there is divergence of opinion as to the wisdom of the law and the practical effects of its operation.

THE CAUSE AND PREVENTION OF PELLAGRA.

Because of the prevalence of pellagra throughout a considerable part of the United States, and the fact that this disease has so far baffled all attempts to ascertain its cause and means of prevention, the following letter from Surg. Joseph Goldberger, in charge of the Government's pellagra investigations, is of interest.

Evidence seems to be accumulating to show that pellagra is due to the use of a dietary in which some essential element is reduced in amount or from which it is altogether absent, or to the use of a dietary in which some element is present in injurious amount.

UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE,
Washington, September 4, 1914.

The SURGEON GENERAL,
Public Health Service.

SIR: As indicated in my progress report of June 5, 1914, the primary object of the pellagra studies that are being conducted under my general direction is the determination of the essential cause of the disease.

Although pellagra has been known and studied abroad for nearly two centuries, not only is its essential cause not known, but the broad question of whether it is to be classed either as a dietary or as a communicable (contagious or infectious) disease has never been satisfactorily determined.

Abroad, the spoiled-maize theory of Lombroso has for many years been the dominating one. Its adequacy, however, has on various grounds been repeatedly questioned.

In the United States, with the progressive and alarming increase in the prevalence of the disease, there has developed both in the lay and in the medical mind the opinion that pellagra is an infectious disease. This opinion has received important support, first, from the Illinois Pellagra Commission and, second, from the Thompson-McFadden